Expatriate Experiences in the Select Novels of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni

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Synopsis

1. Title of the thesis: Expatriate Experiences in the Select Novels of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni.
2. Introduction: Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is an award winning author, poet, activist and teacher. Her themes include the Indian experience, contemporary America, women, immigration, history, myth and joys and challenges of living in a multi-cultural world. Her books have been translated into 29 languages and her work has appeared in over a hundred magazines and anthologies. Some of her novels like *The Mistress of Spices* and *Sister of My Heart* have been made into films. Divakaruni has many awards to her credit like the American Book Award, Alight of India Award, Pushcart Prize, Best American Short Stories Award, Distinguished Writer Award from the South Asian Literary Award Association, Cultural Jewel Award from the Indian Culture Centre, Houston and others. Divakaruni teaches Creative Writing at the University of Houston and writes for both adults and children. Her works are largely set in India and United States and often focus on the experience of South Asian Expatriates. She is also a cofounder and former president of 'Maitri', a helpline founded in 1991 for South Asian women dealing with domestic abuse.

   Divakaruni's novels like *The Mistress of Spices (1997), Sister Of My Heart(1999) , The Vine of Desire (2002), Queen Of Dreams(2004),* and her latest offering, *Oleander Girl (2013)* have been selected for an in-depth analysis, where she stresses on the various expatriates experiences. In these select novels of Divakaruni , the

social and psychological development of the non-western immigrant and the culturally displaced European transplant can be explored. These works belong to different phases of her career and they cover a variety of themes. The characters, situations, perspectives and narrative techniques used by Divakaruni will be studied. Various criticisms have been made on her work but there is a lacuna in Divakaruni's criticism where a study of the diasporic experiences mostly found in her works, is concerned. Because unfortunately very less critical attention has been given to the works taken under study.

3. A Brief Review of the work already done in the field: The work already done in the field has been mainly in the form of critical essays on Divakaruni. All the texts are being studied thoroughly. At the same time different critical essays on the relevant topic have also been read, like D. Dhanalakhmi's, *Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's Sister Of My Heart: tension between Indian culture and western Philosophy: Critical essays in Diasporic Writing.* , N. Jayaram's *"The Indian Diaspora: Dynamics of Migration",* R. Malathy's, *"Quest for Identity in Chitra Divakaruni's Queen Of Dreams*, and Latha Rengachari's "*Debating Expatriate Woman's Writing". The Diasporic Imagination:* Asian American Writing. Besides this, secondary study material is being collected.
4. Objectives: The proposed work will seek to find out the trauma of an expatriate caught between Old and New world values; as well as their urge to discover their inner self to understand their own world better. The proposed work will also give a laser-like insight into the select novels of Divakaruni to give a many layered look at her characters and their respective worlds. It will search for the answer to the following tentative questions.
    1. What is Diaspora?
    2. What is Identity Crisis in Asian –American Diasporic Women?

3. How do the works of Chitra Banerjee Divakarurni reflect the tension between Indian and Western Philosophy and thought?
4. How does Divakaruni use Myth, History and Magic Realism?
5. What are the most tormenting expatriate experiences?
6. How does Divakaruni reveal the deep need to develop a sense of belonging and permanence in expatriates?
7. How do the characters of Divakaruni depict the cross-cultural conflicts?
8. How does Divakurni portray the sense of being uprooted and alienated?
9. Are the women characters portrayed by Divakurni powerful feminist forces?
10. How do her characters reinvent themselves in the quest for their selves?
11. What are the narrative techniques used by Divakurni?
12. Does Divakurni have a woman-centric world view?

5. Noteworthy contributions in the field of the proposed work:

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is a contemporary writer so it is natural that her works are a source of interest to the researchers. There are a number of critical works and articles and essays published on her, it is difficult to mention all in this synopsis. The outstanding contributions include:

- *Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni in Literature: The Human Experience, 9th edition.* By Richard Abcarian and Marvin Klotz.
- *Introduction: The Study of Indian Diaspora: Dynamics of Migration.* By N. Jayaram

- *Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni in Dictionary of Literary Biography by* Somdatta Mandal.
- *The Immigrant Narrative in the Writings of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Critical Essays in Diasporic Writing by* B. Sudipta
- *Conflict over privacy in Indo- American short Fiction. Ethnicity and the American short story* by Laurie Leach
- *Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's Sister of My Heart: Tension Between Indian Culture and Western Philosophy* by D. Dhanalakhmi
- *Ancient Traditions in a New World: Chitra Davakaruni and Ginu Kamani* by Wald Catherine.

It has been observed that though the scholars have scrutinized the works of Divakaruni in different contexts, the proposed work has no parallel and the attempt that will be made in the proposed study, is therefore, totally justified.

6. Proposed Methodology:

   The proposed methodology will be a close textual analysis of the selected primary sources using view points offered by secondary materials. Various critical perspectives relevant to the study will be made to design the conceptual framework. The methodology will include a judicious study and use of articles, reviews, interviews, books, online sources and material related to the study. The format and documentation will be as per the latest MLA handbook '7th edition' by Joseph Gibaldi.

7. Expected outcome of the proposed work:

   The expected outcome of the proposed work will be a thesis with the following tentative chapters:

Chapter 1- Introduction: This chapter will introduce the area of research and highlight the expatriate experiences portrayed in the novels taken under study.

Chapter 2- *The Mistress of Spices:* A Panoramic View of Socio-Cultural experiences

It is the story Tilo, a young woman born in another time in a farway land, who is trained in the ancient art of spices and ordained as a mistress charged with special powers. It is a magical, tantalizing and sensual work. The novel reveals the predicament of the immigrant Indians in America, with an Indian spicy touch. An unexpected romance with a handsome stranger eventually forces Tilo to choose between the supernatural life of an immortal and the vicissitudes of modern life. It is also a novel about the quest of the characters in search of stability.

Chapter-3 *Sister of My Heart*: Struggle between Indian Culture and Western Philosophy

The novel revolves around the dizygotic bondage between Anju and Sudha. The book draws heavily on Divakaruni's own experiences as an immigrant. The book carries on the theme capturing the dilemmas and opportunities confronting women with one foot in traditional Indian society and the other in the modern world. This novel by Divakaruni is about the extra ordinary bond between two women, their family secrets and romantic jealousies that threaten to tear them apart. When tragedy strikes each of them discover that despite distance and marriage they have only each other to turn to.

Chapter 4- *The Vine of Desire:* Contrasting Cultures and Feeling of Alienation

The novel continues the story of the friends, the two young women at the centre of Divakaruni's novel *Sister of My Heart.* They re-kindle their friendship in America and

demonstrate the female independence. They are caught in the flux of tradition and modernity which results in detachment and alienations.

Chapter 6- Queen of Dreams: A Sense of Homelessness

In this novel Mrs. Gupta is a first generation Indian immigrant. She is the queen of dreams. And her daughter Rakhi is a second generation immigrant. Rakhi is born and brought up in the United States; yet she has a longing for India. Mrs. Gupta is totally involved in her dream telling technique which is familiar to an Indian, contrary to the western concepts of analysis the dream telling of Mrs. Gupta is viewed with an eye of suspicion by Rakhi. Mrs. Gupta has rarely spoken about her past and her native India. Rakhi is comfortable in her American life but still she feels a strong connection with her Indianess. Rakhi is confused and faces cross-cultural conflict which is a common problem faced by expatriates.

Chapter 7- *Oleander Girl:* Quest for Identity in an Alien Land

The novel is about a young woman Karobi Roy who leaves India for America on a search that will transform her life. Karobi, orphaned at birth undertakes a courageous search across post 9/11 America to find her true Identity. A sense of belonging and permanence is very often experienced by immigrants staying out of their homeland which get reflects in their writings. Karobi's dramatic, often startling journey will ultimately thrust her into the most difficult decision of her life.

Chapter 8- Conclusion:

This chapter will contain a summation of the findings and will suggest areas of future research.

8. Bibliography in Standard format

Primary sources:

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10. List of Published Papers: Nil